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Testimony on HB 4781, 4782 and 4782 – Electric Bicycles

Good morning Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Bob Wilson and I am the executive director of Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, the statewide voice for non-motorized trail users. Our organization takes great pride in taking a principal role in the building and management of Michigan's nation-leading trail system. We build trails to help promote a healthier and more prosperous Michigan.

Michigan's wonderful natural resources are a blessing and a gift to us all as citizens of this state. As you know members of the Michigan Legislature are bound by the Constitution of this state to provide and promote both public health and access to our state's natural resources for all Michigan citizens (Article IV, sections 51 and 52).

Recently, you and some of your colleagues have sponsored legislation that we believe will help you to meet that charge by specifically providing another viable option for Michigan citizens to access our natural resources and our trails, where appropriate – the use of electric bicycles.

HB 4781, 4782 and 4783 will define and classify electric bicycles according to criteria under the law and require manufacturers to clearly label these bikes according to their operational characteristics. The most critical and in this case relevant part of that legislation is the option of allowing local units of government to decide whether electric bicycles should be permitted on the trails. Our organization strongly supports the use of local control in these types of land use decisions because it further empowers the citizens in a community to voice their concerns to local leaders who can then determine if electric bicycle use is appropriate.

As we have learned through the numerous hours spent in the workgroup that helped to fashion these bills, electric bicycles may not be appropriate in all conditions and we are particularly concerned with the use of electric bicycles on natural surface trails.

It is our position that natural surface trails are not the appropriate place for e-bikes and that trail managers have worked hard to present high quality trail experiences that may be compromised in a variety of ways by inappropriate e-bike use.

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We believe that the opt-in provision for use of e-bikes if it is utilized properly is the right approach because it will or at least should require that trail managers fully assess local opinions and concerns prior to authorizing electric bicycles. We also believe that assessment will lead trail managers to the same conclusion that e-bikes likely do not currently have a place on natural surface trails.

We do however, believe that there is a place and a time for expanded use of our trails to help more citizens use our natural resources. We also believe that allowing this option to be determined by local leaders is a fundamental and key component to this legislation.

In addition to the provisions that are currently in the legislation regarding local control, we would respectfully urge the committee that prior to a decision, trail managers must try to objectively assess local opinions, most likely through at least one public hearing. This might likely occur anyway, but any time we can build more transparency into land use decisions, we believe that we should move in that direction.

We want to thank the Chair and her colleagues for sponsoring this important legislation and to all committee members who are considering these new laws that will help to expand the use of our state trail system, in a deliberative and reasoned fashion.

Sincerely,

Bob Wilson
Executive Director
Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance

